

VCN SURVEY 1998: THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The VCN Survey was distributed in December 1998.

Five hundred copies of the VCN survey were distributed with Volume 4 Issue 6 December 1998 - January 1999 to readers on the mailing list - approximately **302** to member co-operatives and directors and approximately **198** to non-member co-operatives.

These were 35 survey returns and 33 of these were valid from 26 co-operatives - 22 member co-operatives which represented a 28.20% response rate from the then membership of the Federation and 4 non-member co-operatives. Five member co-operatives had multiple responses with a total of 12 (36.36%) respondents:

- ✓ **Co-operative Energy Ltd - three respondents**
- ✓ **Co-operative Purchasing Services Ltd - two respondents**
- ✓ **Emerald & District Co-operative Society Ltd - two respondents**
- ✓ **Murray Goulburn - two respondents.**
- ✓ **Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd - three respondents.**

There was a limited follow-up reminder contact with 10 co-operatives which required mailing out a second copy of the VCN survey - six of these co-operatives (60%) returned completed surveys.

While a **28.20%** return from members is statistically significant and pleasing, it is disappointing that the majority of members did not return the survey - including three co-operatives currently represented on the board and two other co-operatives who until recently were represented on the board. The challenge remains for the Federation to convince more co-operatives to want to return future surveys. The distribution timing of the survey is also a mitigating factor which could have reduced the number of returns.

A previous Member Survey undertaken by the Secretary received a total of 20 responses from members but this survey was only distributed to member co-operatives i.e one per co-operative. Fifteen of the questionnaires were analysed. The return from members was approx **25%**

The 26 co-operatives who responded to the VCN Survey were:

Members

Abalone Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd
Central Sires Co-operative Ltd
Commercial Egg Producers Association Co-operative Ltd
Co-operative Energy Ltd
Co-operative Purchasing Services Ltd
Emerald & District Co-operative Society Ltd
Geelong Radio Cabs Co-operative Ltd
Geelong Wholefoods Co-operative Ltd
Gippsland Tip Truck Hiring Co-operative Ltd
Herd Improvement Co-operative (Maffra) Ltd
Macaulay Community Credit Union
Mirboo North Newspaper Co-operative Ltd
Mt. Murrindal Co-operative Ltd
Murray Goulburn Co-operative Ltd
Mulkirri Co-operative
New Market Co-operative Ltd
Rupnorth Co-operative Ltd
Rural Industries Co-operative Ltd
Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd
South Kingsville Health Services Co-operative Ltd
Terang & District Co-operative Society Ltd
Waverley Trading Co-operative Ltd

Non-members

Flying Horse Credit Union Co-operative Limited
Snowy River Seed Co-operative Ltd
Upper Yarra Community Co-operative Ltd
Werrimul Horticultural CDEP Co-operative Ltd

Of the 22 member co-operatives who have responded:

- ✓ **Three** of the respondents pay an annual subscription of between \$1000 and \$3700 - representing **33.3%** of the nine members in this subscription category.
- ✓ **Three** of the respondents pay an annual subscription of between \$500 and \$750 - representing **21.42%** of the 14 members in this subscription category.
- ✓ **Nine** of the respondents pay an annual subscription of between \$100 and \$350 - representing **23.68%** of the 38 members in this subscription category.
- ✓ **Seven** of the respondents pay an annual subscription of \$50 - representing **46.66%** of the 15 members in this subscription category

Approximately **75 hours** was involved in the automatic and manual processing of the VCN

survey. This was because the survey facilitated a relatively sophisticated analysis beyond the simple listing of responses. It was decided a prolonged analysis was necessary so that the survey **could inform - rather than simply entertain** the board.

What the survey does not address is the expectations of respondents. Expectations critically influence responses to a survey. An expectation can impact on a survey as an inferential assumption and a response to a question depends on this expectation. When, for example, an overall impression is rated as Excellent this could be because the performance exceeded expectations which were relatively low because of the known or assumed limited resources of the Federation. A significant number of members in not responding to the survey indicated that this, and implicitly, the Federation, were low priorities. An ongoing challenge for the Federation is to influence these priorities.

The survey did not explore as to what constituted for respondents an expected standard of performance.

Key Conclusions are as follows:

OVERALL IMPRESSION

KEY CONCLUSION: Given that 96.87% of respondents to the VCN survey rated their overall impression as excellent, very good or good, then, this would indicate there has been an improvement in the rating of the Victorian Co-operative News over the last 12 months.

FEDERATION IMAGE

KEY CONCLUSION: A total very positive and positive rating of 94.37% is pleasing. A future objective is to increase the % of Very Positive.

READABILITY

KEY CONCLUSION: A total rating of 78.13% for very easy and easy readability is pleasing. Future objectives should include increasing the % of very easy and decreasing the % of varies.

INFORMATIVE

KEY CONCLUSION: A very informative rating of 46.88% is promising but not pleasing and was skewed by the question options.

MORE OR LESS

KEY CONCLUSION: What this indicates is that the newer period issues in increasing the number of articles on co-operative practice and co-operative profiles is meeting the aspirations of a significant majority of respondents and increasing the number of articles on Federation activities is meeting the needs of a substantial minority of

respondents. In co-operative news, however, the newer period issues may not be meeting the aspirations of a significant majority of respondents. This depends on the understanding of co-operative news. Items categorised as Federation activities could easily have been categorised as co-operative news because their significance went beyond the involvement of the Federation.

LEGISLATION AND REGULATION

KEY CONCLUSION: The “results” of the Member and VCN surveys are comparable with the exception of two categories where there are significant differences in two content categories - legislation and regulation and Federation activities. It is speculative to determine the basis of these differences without more in-depth research but two factors could be influencing the legislative response - a lessened interest in co-operative legislation and regulation over the 12 month period which separated the surveys and a broader recognition and acceptance of the roles and activities of the Federation with new initiatives such as the Agribusiness Seminar with Monash University and the establishment of the Co-operation Awards. Declining legislation interest could be based on increased familiarity with the legislation. Interest in legislation could be reactivated with new or substantial amendments to legislation.

PUBLISHING FREQUENCY

KEY CONCLUSION: Continued publication six times a year is justified if economically viable, content quality is maintainable and no option is presumed to be genuinely neutral. Production quality demands, however, may dictate a lesser number of issues such as four.

NUMBER OF PAGES

KEY CONCLUSION: There is significant support for eight pages irrespective of the frequency of publication.

RATING OF ARTICLES

KEY CONCLUSION: To a limited extent the Rating of Articles is verifiable by the responses to More and Less of. For co-operative profiles for example, the highest reported number of 75% wanted more and the highest Very Interesting score was 59.38% for the profile of VPC. Legislation and regulations received a comparatively low More of score of 31.25% and the relevant article in VCN received a Very Interesting

Given these key conclusions, we submit the following Recommendations

The Publication

1. There be a maximum and minimum number of 8 pages - 2 A3 sheets
2. There be a minimum of 2 issues and a maximum of four per year with the VCN Editorial Committee authorised to investigate the option of

- printing VCN within the maximum budget.
3. That there be a maximum budget of \$3500 and a minimum budget of \$1750.
 4. That VCN in 1999-2000 be funded from any available OFTBA grant. and in 2000-2001 be funded from subscription income.

The Survey

5. The VCN Survey should be conducted on an annual basis.
6. The next survey should be conducted in February 2000.
7. The VCN Survey should be independent of any Member Survey.
8. The next VCN Survey should target all recipients of VCN.
9. There should be a systematic follow-up of the VCN Survey with two reminders.
10. All directors on the board of the Federation should accept the obligation to facilitate their co-operative's completion of a survey.

David Griffiths
25 May 1999